

Sermon – Holy Indifference

Sunday, October 8, 2017

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-18, Philippians 3:4b-14

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Our first Scripture reading is selected verses from Exodus 20. These ancient, holy words form the foundation of Christian ethics. The people of Israel continue their wilderness journey in stages. In the scripture reading last week, the thirsty community cried out for water, and God made water flow from a rock. This week, we find them at the mountain of Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments. Hear now the word of God.

*1 Then God spoke all these words: 2 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3 you shall have no other gods before me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth....7 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses God's name. 8 Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work...12 Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. 13 You shall not murder. 14 You shall not commit adultery. 15 You shall not steal. 16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. 18 When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, 19 and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of God upon you so that you do not sin." Amen.*

Our second Scripture reading is Philippians 3:4b-14. Paul shares how Christ has changed his life and his aim of spiritual maturity with the believers in Philippi. As Paul reflects on his history and identity, it is apparent that he respects God's covenant with Abraham and honors the law of Moses, given to Israel on Mount Sinai. However, for Paul, spiritual maturity moves beyond following the rules and cultural expectations. Hear now God's Holy word.

*If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.<sup>7</sup> Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ,<sup>1a</sup> the righteousness from God based on faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ<sup>1b</sup> and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> Not that I have already attained this—that is, I have not already matured—but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Beloved, I do not consider myself to have attained this. Instead I am single-minded: Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead, <sup>14</sup> with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

The title of the sermon – “Holy Indifference”

*The Text: ...forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. Philippians 3:13b*

Let us pray, Loving God, thank you for the gift of unchanging laws and Holy Indifference. And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations and thoughts of each of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

Moses presented the Decalogue, the ten words or the Ten Commandments around 1300 BCE. These were not the first list of guidelines in ancient history, neither were they the only list. About four hundred years prior to Moses (around 1700 BCE), Hammurabi, King of Babylon, did a remarkable thing. He bound himself and the people he ruled to 272 statutes, which he had inscribed on a pillar more than fourteen feet high for all in his kingdom to see.

The Code of Hammurabi brought a new order and stability. For the first time, royal decree ceased to be arbitrary and the people were informed of the laws they were required to follow. Until Hammurabi, law was essentially the whim of the king. Laws were created at the king's fancy or personal feelings, and could be changed by him at any moment.

Four centuries later, Moses, who led the Hebrew people out of slavery through the chaotic waters of the Red Sea, gave another set of “laws” by which to live. These laws were not the laws of Moses –subject to change by any leader to follow. These ten simple words embodied the mind and heart of God—irrevocable and unchangeable, which would carve them into a people “blessed to be a blessing.” These laws were to be written on the mind and in the heart of the children of God for generations to come.

In this sense the giving of the Ten Commandments was unique. They were given to create the fullness of life, not simply a well-ordered life. They speak to our relationship to God, our reverence for life and our respect for others and what belongs to them.

In the Decalogue, God teaches God’s children the importance of saying “no” (thou shall not) because the truth is one cannot say “yes” to life until one has learned first to say “no” –no to the distractions, the temptations and the false idols along the way of growing up and coming into one’s own. The voices of our culture speak of unlimited choices and tell us we can and should have everything and have it NOW! ... and yet, studies in human development confirm the importance of “delayed gratification.” Young children who are able to wait, to postpone, to delay gratification live more accomplished, fulfilling lives as they mature and develop. We can never underestimate the importance of accepting limitations and providing healthy boundaries for our children on their journey into adulthood.

Several years ago in the midst of a challenging time within my professional life I became acquainted with a spiritual discipline which gave me the strength *to keep my mouth shut, to persevere, to draw strength from within, and to mature.*

The spiritual discipline is called *Holy Indifference* and grows out of an entire stream of spiritual literature from Clement of Alexandria in the second century to Meister Eckhart in the thirteenth, to Ignatius of Loyola in the sixteenth. This ancient Christian virtue of detachment

does not resonate within our culture where one is encouraged to hold nothing back. When we express our feelings and opinions without reserve, we can drown in the overflowing chaos and hurt feelings that follow, and we can become stuck in our self-righteous indignation. There are consequences to expressing unchartered, unfiltered emotions openly and without reflection.

Learning to hold on to them and explore them in the presence of a trusted friend, counselor or spiritual director can provide perspective. Sharing these feelings in the privacy of our prayer life with the God whose understanding is unsearchable and who joined us in our humanity to share our joys and sorrows can enable healing.

Holy Indifference is not the same as apathy or boredom, which are defense mechanism. When I was conferring with Trajan and Dale about my sermon series ...*Holy Ambivalence* last week and *Holy Indifference* this week, we jested about following up with *Holy Who Cares* next week. Holy Indifference is not about not caring. When someone emphatically says they don't care, think twice about the meaning of their words.

The discipline of Holy Indifference is learning to detach oneself from intense emotions, to let go of them long enough to look at them objectively so as to gain some insight and understanding and to *draw strength from within* on our faith journey. Holy indifference allows us to pause, to take a breath, to hold on to what is right, and to recognize Christ within, the One who strengthens us, the One through whom we can do all things.

Holy Indifference affirms it is not all about me and it is not only about me. Holy Indifference recognizes that God's world is larger than our individual perspective and invites us to see things from another's point of view, to do what is right despite our feelings, and to live into integrity. Holy Indifference does not negate or deny our feelings. Holy Indifference holds those overwhelming feelings back allowing us to mature through self-examination, understanding, and healing.

By the grace of God, may we individually and as a faith community learn the art of holy indifference as we seek to live our faith with love, discretion and integrity...and strife toward the call of God in Christ Jesus.

*forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. Amen.*